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ABSTRACT

An associate director of an independent preschool and elementary school developed and implemented a practicum intervention designed to improve five inexperienced teachers' ability to conduct parent-teacher conferences. Through self-evaluation, teachers identified skills they needed to improve. Intervention focused on preconference planning strategies, conference techniques, and the process of closing the parent-teacher conference. Over a 10-week period, teachers practiced conference skills in weekly 45-minute, after-school workshops. The skills practiced involved discussion, role playing, problem solving, and record keeping. Teachers also practiced conference techniques with other teachers. As a result, teachers became self-confident and successful in conducting conferences. Twelve appendices provide related materials, such as teacher questionnaires, an initial interview guide, an outline for parent-teacher conferences, and a teacher perception questionnaire. (RH)

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IDENTIFICATION OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE TECHNIQUES THAT INEXPERIENCED TEACHERS NEED TO DEVELOP

by

JEANNE M. KORN

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A Practicum Report
submitted to the Faculty of the Center for the
Advancement of Education of Nova University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist

The abstract of this report may be placed in a
National Database System for reference.

June/1990

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Authorship Statement

I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. Where it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other workers in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.

Jeanne Korn

Abstract

Identification of Parent-Teacher Conference Techniques That Inexperienced Teachers Need to Develop.

Korn, Jeanne, 1990: Practicum Report, Nova University, Center for the Advancement of Education.
Descriptors: Communication/Teacher Skills/Classroom Techniques/Teaching Techniques/Teacher Effectiveness/ Teaching Methods/Parent Counseling/Parent-Teacher Cooperation/Parent-Teacher Conferences/Parent School Relationships/Teacher Role/Interviewing Techniques/ Parent School Relationships/Interpersonal Communication/Special Education Teachers/Communication Skills/Parent Attitudes/Parent Role/Teacher Parent Relationships/

Anxiety exhibited by inexperienced teachers concerning parent-teacher conferences was addressed by the implementation of conference techniques in the forum of strategy identification and strategy implementation practice. In a 10-week program, teachers practiced various conference skill techniques in weekly 45-minute workshops after school. The teachers participated in discussions, role playing, problem-solving strategies, and the construction of a record keeping tool. By allowing teachers to become aware of effective communication techniques and to practice these techniques, the teachers were able to become self-confident and successful when conducting parent-teacher conferences as a result of this program. Appendices include teacher questionnaires, role playing activities, initial interview guide, outline for parent-teacher conferences, and teacher perception questionnaire.

Appendix J

Nova University
Center For The Advancement of Education
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Observer Verification Form

Verification of Practicum Activity

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Practicum students in Nova's M.S. and Ed.S. programs are asked to provide external verification that the project activities reported in their final practicum documents took place as described. You have been designated an observer to fulfill this confirmation function by the student named below. On this sheet, then, please write a note attesting to your knowledge of the project activity described in the final practicum report to which this will be attached. (Note that you are not asked to evaluate or make judgments about the quality of the project.)

Practicum Title IDENTIFICATION OF PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE TECHNIQUES THAT INEXPERIENCED TEACHERS NEED TO DEVELOP

Student's Name JEANNE M. KORN

Program Site UNIVERSITY SCHOOL, CORAL SPRINGS Date 5-24-90

Observer's Name JAMES H. SCHROEDER James H. Schroeder
(please print----and sign)

Observer's position ASSOCIATE HEADMASTER Phone # 752-3020

Observer's comment on impact of the project (handwritten):

MRS. KORN'S PROJECT HAD AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS. THEIR COMMENTS WERE EXTREMLY POSITIVE AND REFLECTED THEIR SENSE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE IN ALL ASPECTS OF CONFERENCING & COMMUNICATION. I STRONGLY URGE MRS. KORN TO MAKE THIS PROGRAM AVAILABLE TO ALL STAFF MEMBERS AT THE UNIVERSITY SCHOOL.

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CHAPTER I

Purpose

The educational setting for which this research proposal was directed is an independent school housing Early Childhood three year olds through Grade Eight in the southeastern United States. In order to substantiate the generalizability of this research, aspects of this school and its community will be highlighted.

The school accepts the premise that each child is unique in ability, talent, and learning style. In accepting that premise, the school recognizes its responsibility in creating a flexible, humanistic, learning environment so that the specific needs of its students will be met.

The school is a college preparatory, tuition based, independent school. The campus is nine years old in this particular location. The school is comprised of two buildings on a 7 1/2 acre lot. One acre is used for playground areas. The campus is beautifully landscaped with walkways between the lower school building and the upper school building. There

are current plans for expansion. The university that supports this school is currently involved in developing plans for an extension to the lower school building as well as a new building on the campus. The new building will contain approximately 30,000 sq. feet of space. The expansion and new building is due to a largely growing community.

The school is housed in a young family-oriented community which was identified through a feasibility study this past year as having one of the highest per family incomes in the state of Florida. The school is actively involved in community events and projects. Hence, the school has access to many of the university's resources, such as computer services, printing services, library services, and many others. This university support adds much to the college preparatory atmosphere of the school.

The school is organized into three units. The lower school includes programs for three-year-olds through kindergarten. The elementary division includes grades one through five. The upper division accommodates grades six through eight. The design of the curriculum reflects the philosophy and goals of the school and is based on the following principles:

(a) The curriculum provides for the individual and group needs of students in a variety of educational settings designed to accommodate groups less than 20 students per class; and (b) the curriculum is flexible to meet the continually growing community, new technologies, and the opportunity for program improvement inherent in the strengths and interests possessed by staff members.

The curriculum design provides for individual and small group needs of students with students grouped for teaching by performance levels. The school's philosophy accommodates both acceleration and enrichment of curriculum areas for individual students. The programs at this school are designed to complement each child's needs and interests in an educational framework where expectations of students, faculty, and administrators are high. It is this atmosphere that allows average, above average, and gifted students not only to work to their potential, but often exceed their own expectations. Thinking skills are taught and emphasized in the regular curriculum and in special units. These skills include Bloom's Taxonomy of Thinking Skills with much emphasis placed on the higher

levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Weekly, students spend time developing projects that incorporate research skills, creative problem-solving skills and logical reasoning skills. These skills are worked on by all members of the faculty.

Apart from regular curriculum activities, students are encouraged and given the opportunity to do challenging and enriching activities throughout the school day. These enrichment activities are supplied by both the classroom teacher and a resource teacher. Specific skills in creativity are taught during some of these sessions. These skills help students to explore areas, such as originality and fluency in thinking. When students demonstrate an individual interest in a particular area, they are given the opportunity to pursue and study that interest in depth with a resource person or a knowledgeable person in that field.

The primary goal of the school, however, is concerned with the intellectual development of the student. Yet, the school also focuses on the development of the total child--intellectually, physically, and emotionally.

The school has 23 classrooms and 30 members of the teaching staff. There are five teaching aides that work in the Early Childhood programs, Grade One, and Grade Two areas. The school utilizes the concept of team teaching.

The three-year-old program has two teachers, one aide, and 25 students. The four-year-old program has three teachers, one aide, and 49 students. The kindergarten program has three teachers, one aide, and 47 students. In Grade One there are three teachers, one aide, and 51 students. Grade Two consists of one teacher, one aide, and 19 students. Grade Three has two teachers and 39 students. Grade Four has two teachers and 29 students. Grade Five and Grade Six share six teachers for 30 students. Grades Seven and Eight share many of the same teachers as Grades Five and Six. Grades Seven and Eight contain 40 students. The total students enrolled are 332.

The faculty are under the Florida state guidelines for certification. This school has been accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools for the past nine years. It also holds an accreditation from the Florida Council of Independent Schools.

The teacher return rate is excellent. Over the past five years, an average of three teachers have left each year. Reasons varied from pregnancy to husbands being transferred out of state. Two teachers who left four years ago returned last year. The faculty is made up of two males and 28 females. The staff's ages range from 22 to 61. There is a balance of experienced teachers with inexperienced teachers. The team teaching approach also benefits the staff. New teachers to the school or to teaching are paired with experienced teammates. This type of "mentorship" has been very well received by the faculty. The teachers from each area share the responsibility of being the team coordinator for a nine-week period. This aids in helping develop an excellent communication system between the teachers and the administration. A teacher-based management system has been utilized for the past several years. Teachers vote on curriculum changes, policies, and other events that directly affect them. Teachers help develop and write curriculum. They also participate in establishing many of the daily management procedures that affect their classrooms. Over 70 percent of the faculty currently

hold Master Degrees. Another nine percent of the faculty are currently working on an advanced degree. Another two percent are working on their Educational Specialist Degree.

There are three special needs programs available to the students. The first is the Speech and Language Program which is held on part-time basis only. This program assists a small number of students to acquire developmentally appropriate speech sounds and language skills. The second special needs program is the Gifted Program. A certified teacher in gifted education implements this program on a daily basis. Students are identified by academic achievement, test scores, and teacher recommendations. The third program is the Learning Resource Program. This program provides tutorial services necessary for students who have been identified as having a mild learning disability. Services include a prescriptive program in the form of an individual educational plan; modifications of the regular curriculum; continuous consultation with students, classroom teacher, and parents; and an ongoing monitoring and evaluation of student's progress. Students are scheduled on a daily basis

and are tutored in groups of no more than five students. This program accommodates students with special needs in the areas of language arts, reading, and mathematics. The Learning Resource teachers form a team that diagnoses, prescribes, and implements the prescriptive programs for students.

The Admissions Department of the school is made up of an Admissions Committee which includes the Associate Headmaster, the Director, the Associate Director, and classroom teachers. The admissions secretary responds to inquiries and sets up appointments for students to visit the school for one day and be tested during that time. Students are given the Stanford Achievement Test, the McCarthy Screening, the Gesell, or the Comprehensive Testing Program depending upon their age. Previous student records must accompany the student on the day of visitation. Students and parents are interviewed by the Director or Associate Headmaster. A vote of the majority of the Admissions Committee is made regarding acceptance of a student. Each student in the school is invited back each year if appropriate behavior and academic standards are maintained. Students holding below a two point average are placed

on probation for one quarter to allow the student to improve. If improvement is not made, the student is asked to leave. Teachers and administrators work individually with each student on probation to help assist them in improving their grades.

Achievement test scores are given in Grades Kindergarten through Grade Eight each spring during the month of April. Students in Kindergarten are administered the Stanford Achievement Test. Students in Grades One through Eight are given the Comprehensive Testing Program from the Educational Records Bureau. Results are mailed to the home with the final report card in June. The average test scores fall within the average to superior range. These scores fall within the fifth to the ninth stanine.

The writer has two years experience as Associate Director and 13 years experience as an elementary school teacher. The Director works with the Headmaster, Associate Headmaster, and Associate Director each day. The writer has been the Director of the school supervising Early Childhood three-year-olds through Grade Eight for the past two years.

There are five inexperienced teachers that were new to the school this year. These teachers have less than one year of teaching experience. At the beginning of the school year an informal survey was given to the entire staff in order to identify possible inservice topics. One specific area that seemed to be identified by the beginning teachers was that of parent-teacher conference techniques. Also, during the team meetings during the month of September, the inexperienced teachers were anxious about the pending parent-teacher conferences that were scheduled for the first week of October. Therefore, it became apparent that some type of program was needed to help develop techniques in the area of parent-teacher conferences.

Despite their first experience in October of holding parent-teacher conferences, the beginning teachers still experienced anxiety concerning the Spring conference as represented by the results of a Perception Inventory (Appendix A:36).

Five inexperienced teachers needed to develop and/or to strengthen their parent-teacher conference skills. Prior to implementation of this practicum, these five teachers mastered 2.6 out of 5.0 of the

necessary parent-teacher conference techniques as identified by the needs assessment device that was administered (Appendix B:39). Each teacher completed a self-evaluation using the needs assessment tool.

Due to the importance of forming a close working alliance with parents, teachers need to develop effective techniques to utilize during parent-teacher conferences. Both the teacher and parent need to feel secure and positive rather than defensive or anxious when speaking with each other.

These five inexperienced teachers needed to raise their current parent-teacher conference skill mastery level from 2.6 to a minimum of 4.0 on a scale of 5.0. An increase of 50 percent was the targeted goal. There was also a need to increase mastery level on the Perception Inventory which would indicate a lowering of anxiety levels of the teachers by raising confidence levels. The five inexperienced teachers needed to raise their confidence levels from 2.5 to a minimum of 3.8 on a scale of 5.0. An increase of 50 percent was the targeted goal.

The purpose of this research paper was to identify through self-evaluation the conference skills that the

the five inexperienced teachers needed to develop in order to successfully conduct parent-teacher conferences in the Spring and on into the future. Teachers have a responsibility to increase the parents' understanding of the school's program and curriculum. Also, teachers need to inform parents of the child's ability, effort, and the quality of work and the progress made. Without effective parent-teacher conference techniques, these teacher responsibilities to the school will not be able to be accomplished successfully throughout each school year.

CHAPTER II

Research and Solution Strategy

Unfortunately, many teacher training programs do not provide an opportunity for students to learn the skills and techniques of conferencing with parents. The importance of effective parent-teacher relationships cannot be overemphasized. Teachers who can understand each child in his environment will be capable of making appropriate educational plans in the classroom. Parents who are provided with information about the school programs and their child's academic progress can be strong supporters in their child's academic progress throughout school. Parents and teachers who recognize each other's capabilities can join together in successful problem solving.

There is something about a relationship between a teacher and a parent which is built on respect that makes both individuals much more capable of assisting the child in his/her academic development.

Stephens and Wolf (1987), state that effective communication techniques with parents can save some students from school failure. A key factor in the

success of a parent-teacher conference is the teacher's ability to elicit important information from the parents concerning their child.

One-to-one parent conferences should focus on the education of the child as a collaborative effort. Teachers need to know how to accomplish such a task. During the initial parent-teacher conference, Gonsalves (1988) states that parents should be made fully aware of the educational program and be made to be a part of the education process for their child. Gonsalves (1988) further states that an early conference within the first month or so of the beginning of school helps to establish parent-teacher communication and sets the framework for successful contacts. Further research by Vallin (1988) supports the theory that early contact to parents by teachers skilled in conference techniques helps ensure a successful relationship between the home and the school. Obviously, this benefit is greatest for the child.

The organization of the parent-teacher conference by the teacher is an essential component of a successful conference as stated by Stephens and Wolf (1987). They also explain that teachers should

organize into broad categories the areas of the child's development that will be discussed at the conference. This process should be done as part of the pre-conference preparation. Teachers will have an opportunity to practice this technique during the 10 weeks. It is imperative that parents receive accurate and relevant information in a sensitive manner at each parent-teacher conference.

Teachers need to work with parents. Parents need to be complimented and reassured by teachers (Morgan, 1989). Parents want "the personal touch" from teachers during a parent-teacher conference (Lindle, 1989). Teachers need to utilize positive body language and oral language during a parent-teacher conference.

Vallin (1988) investigated in her research parental expectations of a conference. Vallin states that parents want to know the teacher's expectations of their child as well as themselves. Teachers should also ask the parents as to their expectations for their child. The techniques for initiating such dialogue must be held by the teacher in order to ensure a profitable conference.

Meyers and Pawlas (1989) state that teachers should follow three basic steps to ensure a successful parent-teacher conference: preconference homework, communication during the conference, and follow-up. Preconference homework includes such things as being relaxed and poised, being knowledgeable of the child's previous history, setting an agenda for the conference, and preparing a conference form for record keeping. Effective communication during the conference should include determining the area for discussion. Teachers should be aware of multi-concern conferences as they tend to have an overwhelming effect on parents. During the conference teachers should prepare a brief informal greeting. Teachers need to maintain the momentum and focus of the conference as they record notes from the discussion. If needed, a date for a follow-up conference should be set at that time.

By assisting teachers to become aware of necessary pre-conference, conference, and post-conference techniques, a successful parent-teacher relationship will be developed. Hence, cooperatively a school-based educational program can be developed for each student. The 10-week technique development sessions will assist

teachers in becoming more aware of effective communication techniques that will be valuable during parent-teacher conferences.

Candelaria and Knox (1987), and Bjorklund and Burger (1987) emphasize the importance of being prepared for some parents to argue and disagree. Teachers need to establish trust through effective verbal communication skills and proper preconference preparation work. It may be necessary to remind parents that through cooperative efforts any conflicts that arise will be addressed as a team. Teachers need to avoid using judgmental statements during conference sessions.

Teachers need to view preparing for parent-teacher conferences as an ongoing process. Preparation should begin before the child enters the program and continue until he leaves. Work samples and anecdotes of typical behaviors should be collected to share with the parents at the conference (Bjorklund and Burger, 1987).

Much research points to the fact that productive parent-teacher conferences include establishing a firm conference date. Background information on the student should be reviewed. Teachers should exhibit a positive

attitude toward parents. Each conference should begin with a description of an area in which the student has excelled, and then move the discussion into ongoing needs areas of the child ("Parent-Teacher Conferences," 1987).

As cited by Gelfer and Perkins (1987), teachers should avoid tangents and overdone attention to issues. Teachers should state essential points developed in advance of the conference. They need to allow sufficient time for parent responses, questions, and other types of input. Also, parents need to be guided to help reach solutions. They should be made to feel part of the solution finding at the conference.

Gordon (1986) states that the pressures of parenting and teaching have much in common. Both teachers and parents play a vital role in young children's growth and development. Parent-teacher conferences can be beneficial for teachers, parents, and children alike.

Barron and Calvin's (1984) research results indicated that teachers need to establish eye contact throughout the conference session. Total commitment to the parents is indicated through the use of eye

contact. By looking, leaning forward, nodding, and smiling, the teacher can demonstrate that his/her attention and interest are focused on what is being discussed. A teacher's choice of words is of the utmost importance when discussing a problem. Discussion of the problem area is based on examples of work and objective observations, on specifics more than generalizations.

Parents need to be reassured that teachers are willing and capable to implement plans to intervene in the problem area, if any. Focusing on what the teacher and school can do helps parents to feel that their ability as parents is not in question (Stephens and Wolf, 1987). "The nightmare of facing parents becomes the dream of helping a child develop to his potential when teachers know how to talk with parents" (Barron and Calvin, 1984:77).

The research explains the importance of teachers utilizing certain techniques that will ensure success of the parent-teacher meeting. Teachers need to be made aware of specific techniques that research has demonstrated to be successful when dealing with parents. Parent-teacher conference skills don't just

happen. These techniques need to be identified and practiced by inexperienced teachers in order for these professionals to feel comfortable and in charge of the events of each parent-teacher conference. The 10-week parent-teacher conference sessions provided the beginning teachers an opportunity to practice and, hopefully, master a number of effective communication techniques necessary for effective parent-teacher-student relationships.

CHAPTER III

Method

After 10 weeks of weekly workshops in conference skill techniques, the five inexperienced teachers participated in discussions, role playing, and problem-solving strategies sessions. These sessions were designed to help raise the teacher's group conference skill mastery level.

Also, after the completion of the 10-week implementation sessions, the teachers once again completed a self-evaluation using the Perception Inventory Device in order to determine whether personal anxiety levels decreased and confidence levels increased concerning parent-teacher conferences. Teachers' group scores increased as their confidence increased.

During the Spring, parent-teacher conference meetings followed the completion of the 10-week workshops in conference techniques. The five inexperienced teachers self-confidently implemented the newly mastered parent-teacher conference techniques. These techniques were self-assessed by each

inexperienced teacher. The writer also rated each teacher using the needs assessment device. This process was performed during one of the parent-teacher conferences for each of the five inexperienced teachers during the Spring parent-teacher conferences. The writer viewed one conference of each of the beginning teachers in order to evaluate their usage of the skills gained during the 10-week workshop sessions. Each individual scored was averaged together to obtain a group mean score.

After reviewing the literature there appeared to be a consensus of opinion that specific parent-teacher conference techniques need to be identified and practiced by the classroom teacher. Therefore, the writer developed a strategy for the inexperienced teacher to be given the opportunity to strengthen and/or develop successful parent-teacher conference skills.

The inexperienced teachers were involved in weekly 45-minute workshops for a period of 10 weeks in order to help develop positive communication skills. The session design was broken down into three components that were identified in the literature. The first

component involved developing skills dealing with preconference planning strategies. The second component incorporated techniques that needed to be utilized while the teacher was conducting a parent-teacher conference. The third component of the weekly workshops helped develop skills in order to successfully close a parent-teacher conference.

The session design incorporated role playing, discussions, practice problem-solving strategies, the construction of a record keeping tool, and actual practice in parent-teacher conferences with other teachers.

By allowing teachers to become conscious of effective communication techniques and to practice these techniques, the teachers were given the opportunity to become self-confident and successful when conducting parent-teacher conferences. This program allowed the teachers to see in action and then actually experiment with research based techniques for communicating with parents.

Weekly Schedule

The weekly sessions took place every Tuesday from 3:00 p.m. to 3:45 p.m. for a period of 10 weeks. The

beginning teachers volunteered to participate in the parent-teacher conference technique sessions after the school day ended each Tuesday for the 10-week period.

The weekly sessions included a five-minute discussion to evaluate specific techniques gained at each weekly session. The final evaluation occurred during Week Ten's session. Each teacher completed an individual assessment of parent-teacher conference techniques gained during the 10-week sessions using the evaluation forms found in Appendix A:36 and Appendix B:39. Then, a comparison was done using a pre-post assessment comparison of the mean scores obtained on both assessment devices for each of the beginning teachers.

Week One - An overview of the goals and objectives of the weekly sessions was given in writing to each of the inexperienced teachers (Appendix C:43). A brief summary of pertinent research was shared with each teacher which was prepared in a hand-out form. A film was shown which subject dealt with successful communication skills between adults.

Week Two - An overview of the next three sessions were distributed to each teacher. The next three sessions addressed the first component of developing effective conference techniques which is various preconference planning strategies. Areas that were discussed in week one were effective methods to review student files and academic skill areas. Also, a form was distributed that outlined a general conference plan of action (Appendix D: 45). Each teacher chose one student from her/his classroom to use as a case study throughout the ten-week sessions. The teachers began to develop a conference plan of action form for this student.

Week Three - Preconference planning strategies continued to be discussed during the third session. A brief review of session two was implemented. Specific concerns were identified concerning each teacher's case study student. The areas that were discussed were academic, social, and behavioral. The conference plan of action form was utilized as a guideline to follow when summarizing student concerns for parents (Appendix E: 47). Teachers shared the wording of their concerns

and practice using wording from the plan of action form.

Week Four - A problem-solving strategy was used during this fourth week of implementation (Appendix G: 51). A specific parent concern was given to each teacher. The teacher practiced developing a preconference plan for this imaginary parent concern (Appendix D: 45). Teachers shared strategies with one another (Appendix F: 49).

Week Five - In the second component, conducting parent-teacher conferences, techniques were shared with teachers that took them from setting the physical environment for parents to establishing a rapport through body gestures and comments (Appendix H: 53). Teachers identified "positive" body language to use during a conference even during stressful discussions. A list of suggested statements and body movements were given to each teacher.

Week Six - The second component continued to be developed. A video camera was utilized during this session. Teachers practiced phrasing statements to parents to identify specific concerns in the academic,

social, or behavioral areas. This was videotaped and viewed at the beginning of Week Seven.

Week Seven - Teachers engaged in "mock parent-teacher conferences." Experienced teachers joined in helping to give the inexperienced teacher practice in conference techniques. Specific student concerns were discussed. Inexperienced teachers began to utilize preconference and conference strategies (Appendix I:55).

Week Eight - Teachers continued working on developing conference strategies. This session involved practicing skills in interpreting facts by using a question to state possible conclusions, utilizing adroit questioning to get parents to indicate any problem areas, and being an active listener. Hand-outs were given to help reinforce these strategies (Appendix J:57).

Week Nine - The third component was practiced during this session, terminating the conference. Teachers were given an outline of suggested ways to terminate the parent-teacher conference (Appendix K:59). The following points were discussed: Review of main points, summarized plan of action to be taken with

the student, way to close on a constructive note, and set date for follow-up meeting. A summary sheet of the three components for effective conferences was handed out at this final session (Appendix L:61).

Week Ten - The writer observed each of the five teachers during one of their parent-teacher conferences. The three-part component program was used as a guideline for the observer to critique the teacher (Appendix A:36 and Appendix B:39).

CHAPTER IV

Results

Results of the practicum program were determined by comparing the mean scores on two evaluation devices administered before and after 10 weeks of practicing conference techniques.

The beginning teachers completed a pre-implementation and post-implementation needs assessment inventory. The arithmetic mean was used to determine mastery level before and after implementation. The pre-implementation needs assessment inventory indicated a 2.6 group mean score. The post-implementation needs assessment inventory indicated a 4.4 group mean score, exceeding the desired 50 percent increase of the outcome objective. The mastery level of the group increased 69 percent.

Similar success was noted on the post-implementation perception inventory. There was a definite decrease of anxiety levels for each of the beginning teachers. The pre-implementation perception inventory indicated a mean score of 2.5. The post-implementation perception inventory indicated a 4.0

mean score, on a scale of 5.0, exceeding the 50 percent increase of the outcome objective.

The teachers did utilize a number of the pre-conference, conference, and post-conference techniques during the Spring parent-teacher conferences. The use of these techniques were asssessed by the writer while observing one parent-teacher conference of each beginning teacher. A post-implementation needs assessment inventory was completed by the writer for each beginning teacher. A group mean score of 4.5 was obtained. Only a posttest was given.

CHAPTER V

Recommendations

The results of this practicum demonstrate the positive effect practicing conference techniques has on improvement of beginning teacher's interview techniques and attitudes toward parent-teacher conferences. The recommendation of the writer for future use of this research would be to use this as an additional component for administrators to use in conjunction with the state adopted Beginning Teacher Program. This training package would assist beginning teachers in developing appropriate conference techniques for use throughout the school year. This parent-teacher conference technique program could be used over an extended period of time; hence, allowing teachers to continually practice these techniques.

This program could also be used as a staff development presentation for the entire staff throughout the school year as a central focus theme of staff improvement.

Also, the writer suggests utilizing individual components of this program to help increase individual

teacher's conference techniques as areas of weakness are identified perhaps through teacher evaluations.

Additional strategies could be added to this program at any time in order to enhance or improve upon it. This type of program is open ended and should be constantly re-evaluated as it is implemented each school year.

Progressive components that might succeed this initial program might include development of audio-video training tapes and a brochure of parent-teacher conference techniques to be used by experienced teachers as a review.

Evaluation of the three-part evaluation process helped the writer to realize that the project to improve conference techniques proved very successful. The teachers stated that one of the most important results of this project was the increasing awareness of necessary techniques that need to be implemented during each parent-teacher conference.

Additional positive by-products and benefits noticed by the writer, that the beginning teachers came away from the project with a "hands-on" organizational format, increased sensitivity to effective language

techniques, consideration and respect for parent needs, and greater confidence and self-esteem.

There were also suggestions made by the beginning teachers to modify and combine weeks six and seven together. The video taping could be performed during the mock parent-teacher conferences. The phrasing of statements to parents to identify specific concerns could be incorporated into one video taping session.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Pre/Post Perception Inventory

Appendix A

PERCEPTION INVENTORY

Why You Are Doing This: To find out more about yourself so you can facilitate parent-teacher conferences, optimumly.

What You Are To Do: Circle the one answer you agree with most.

Almost never - 1
Very few times - 2
Sometimes - 3
Most of the time- 4
Almost always - 5

1. I enjoy conducting parent-teacher confereces.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I am relaxed when I meet with parents.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I feel comfortable when I prepare a written outline of the main topics to be covered during the parent-teacher conference.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I am confident when a parent questions a decisions or a strategy used with their child.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I am comfortable discussing a student's weaknesses with their parents.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix A

Almost never - 1.

Very few times - 2

Sometimes - 3

Most of the time - 4

Almost always - 5.

6. I am comfortable handling an angry parent.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I am comfortable responding to a parent who feels that their child's difficulties is the sole responsibility of the teacher.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel comfortable telling a parent that additional support services may be needed.

1 2 3 4 5

9. I am comfortable responding to impromtu questions from parents.

1 2 3 4 5

10. I am confident with the majority of decisions and recommendations that I make during parent-teacher conferences.

Appendix B

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

DIRECTIONS: Please use the scale below to rate your use of each of the conference techniques.

RATING SCALE: 1 = Do not use this technique

2 = seldom use this technique

3 = occasionally use this technique

4 = usually use this technique

5 = always use this technique

1. Child's background is researched using the cumulative folder prior to the conference.

   1 2 3 4 5

2. A written outline of topics to be discussed during the parent-teacher conference is prepared.

   1 2 3 4 5

3. Teacher concerns are stated in behavioral terms. Specific behaviors are identified and stated.

   1 2 3 4 5

4. Prepared to demonstrate any suggested activities/behavioral charts/homework strategies, etc. in order to clarify procedures.

   1 2 3 4 5

5. A comfortable environment is planned where the conference is to take place.

   1 2 3 4 5

6. Parents are always greeted with a friendly gesture, such as a handshake.

   1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

7. A reasonable time limit is planned and is verbally stated at the beginning of each conference.

1 2 3 4 5

8. The purpose of objectives of the conference are clearly stated at the beginning of the parent-teacher conference.

1 2 3 4 5

9. Positive statements concerning students are made to help create a non-threatening atmosphere.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Active listening is utilized throughout the conference.

1 2 3 4 5

11. Only relevant issues to the planned topics are discussed during the conference.

1 2 3 4 5

12. Parent concerns are dealt with in a positive manner using non-defensive language.

1 2 3 4 5

13. Parent opinions are considered and used when drawing up an action plan for the student.

1 2 3 4 5

14. Meeting objectives are summarized to clarify the conference statements.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

15. Notes ae taken during the conference on stratogies discussed and any follow-up activities to be done and by whom. Those notes are signed by the teacher and the poarents involved.

1 2 3 4 5

16. A follow-up note, telephone call, and/or conference is done after each conference.

1 2 3 4 5

Parent-Teacher Conference Needs Assessment

☐ Prior to implementation

☐ After implimentation program

Teacher's Signature_____Date_____

Appendix C

Week One

I. Discuss research pertinent to parent-teacher conference techniques.

II. Overview of Goal and Objectives for the 10 week, 30 minute sessions.

- A. Pre-Conference Techniques
- B. Conference Techniques
- C. Post-Conference Techniques

III. Hand-out on interview strategies.

IV. View film on interview strategies.

Appendix D

Conference Outline Form

APPENDIX D

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCE OUTLINE FORM

STUDENT_____ TEACHER_____ GRADE_____

OPENDING POSITIVE STATEMENT_____

_____

READING:_____

_____

MATHEMATICS:_____

_____

LANGUAGE ARTS:_____

_____

SCIENCE_____

_____

SOCIAL STUDIES_____

_____

HANDWRITING_____

_____

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS_____

_____

ART, MUSIC_____

_____

OTHER AREAS TO BE DISCUSSED_____

_____

_____

POSITIVE CLOSING REMARK_____

_____

APPENDIX E

PLAN OF ACTION

PRE-CONFERENCE TECHNIQUES

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

WHO: _____

WHAT IS: _____

_____

_____

_____

WHAT SHOULD BE: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

WHY: _____

_____

_____

_____

HOW: _____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX F

WEEK FOUR

PRE-CONFERENCE TECHNIQUES

I. Problem solving strategies will be used to help develop a pre-conference plan for an "imaginary" student concern.

II. Teachers will share their strategies with each other.

III. Helpful reminders for teachers:

A. Parents often consider their children extensions of themselves.

B. Be sensitive in describing a student's strengths and weaknesses.

C. Jot down specific terms that you will use to discuss student. Be positive. Be honest. Use specific examples to help clarify concern.

D. Write down an "ice breaker" to begin your parent-teacher conference(a statement about the weather, a statement about an upcoming school event, a statement about something in your classroom)

APPENDIX G

PROBLEMS TO HELP SOLVE

1. Nancy's school work is rarely completed, she engages in frequent daydreaming behavior, and has missed 12 of the last 32 days of school.

   HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE NANCY'S PROGRESS TO HER PARENTS?

2. Jeanne has temper tantrums daily. She refuses to remain in the time-out chair in the classroom. She displays aggressive behavior to other children in the class.

   PLEASE DESCRIBE THE WAYS JEANNE HANDLES SITUATIONS IN WHICH SHE GETS FRUSTRATED OR IF SHE DOESN'T GET HER WAY.

3. Lynn refuses to turn in any paper unless it is perfect, sometimes redoing the same task five or six times.

   DESCRIBE LYNN'S BEHAVIOR TO HER PARENTS.

Appendix H

Week Five

CONFERENCE TECHNIQUES

I. Identification of positive body language to use with parents during a conference.

   A. Smiles

   B. Leaning forward in an active listener manner.

   C. Nodding your head to demonstrate agreement with a statement a parent may make.

   D. Extending a friendly handshake to greet the parent.

   E. Maintaining a calm, interested facial expression.

   F. Maintaining a relaxed appearance throughout the conference.

II. Crucial teacher behaviors to practice.

   A. Recognize parents' concerns.

   B. Be responsive to their questions.

   C. Be able to accurately describe the student's progress in relation to established norms.

   D. Encourage parent to discuss each point--clarify as needed.

   E. Use examples of student's work whenever possible to discuss progress.

   F. Explain clearly how student's are evaluated.

   G. If you cannot answer a question, <u>SAY SO.</u>

APPENDIX I

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE RECORD SHEET

STUDENT'S NAME_____ GRADE_____ TEACHER_____

DATE_____ PARENT(S) ATTENDED_____

PROBLEM/CONCERN/REQUEST_____

SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS_____

TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY_____

PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY_____

STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY_____

FOLLOW-UP CONFERENCE DATE_____

Appendix J

Questioning Strategies

Questioning Techniques

It should be used to obtain specific information or clarification.

Ask leading questions rather than pointed questions.

Avoid responding for the parent.

Questions should be used to lead parents to discuss relevant matters.

Your voice tone and inflection are important.

If the parent asks "What would you do if _____," they are really interested in support in the decision that they made.

Use questions about the relevant matter to redirect the parent.

Include questions that encourage a parent to talk in areas which may be difficult.

Avoid asking questions that get a "yes" or "no" response.

Appendix K

Week Nine

TERMINATING THE CONFERENCE

I. Outline of ways to terminate the conference.

A. Summarize the conference. (I'll try to restate what we've discussed today)

B. First review all recommendations made.

C. Mention any unresolved issues that need further discussion.

D. Include in summary those activities which were discussed for use between school and home.

E. Make a positive ending statement concerning the conference and their child.

II. Summarize the three components of a successful parent-teacher conference. State some of the important points in each of the three areas.

III. Hand-out —"FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANIZING YOUR PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCE"

APPENDIX L

FRAMEWORK FOR ORGANIZING YOUR PARENT CONFERENCE TIME

I. Before the parent conference:

a. Learn something of the family's background.
b. Get a picture of THIS child's place in the family.
c. Clarify and clearly state YOUR purpose/objective for the conference.
d. Be prepared to demonstrate any suggested activities and how they should be done.
e. Hold the conference at a time and place to minimize interruptions.
f. Arrange the physical setting to be conducive to a free exchange.

II. During the parent conference:

a. Establish in your mind a reasonable time limit for the conference and verbally state it.
b. Determine "where the parents are coming from" - their view of the child.
c. State the purpose of the conference simply and broadly.
d. Use language that is commensurate with the family's background.
e. Listen more than you talk.
f. Encourage the parent to "try-out" the activity in your presence.
g. Check and monitor your appearance.
h. Speak only on what you know or have expertise.
i. Be professional at all times.

III. Terminating the parent conference:

a. Summarize the meeting to clarify any confusion.
b. Listen for a logical spot to make a statement.
c. Mention any follow-up activities to be done and decide who is to be responsible for them.
d. Set a date for activities to begin and end.

IV. After the parent conference:

a. Review notes to prevent items from being forgotten.
b. Share information ONLY with appropriate personnel.
c. Remember CONFIDENTIALITY.